

**Testimony before the Appropriations Committee
on the Governor's Proposed Biennial Budget
March 6, 2015
Willie Waden**

Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Willie Waden and I am a registered voter in the town of Hartford, Connecticut. I am here to testify on the Governor's Proposed Biennial Budget.

I am opposed to the proposed cuts to the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

I have been struggling with mental illness for the better part of 35 years. I spent most of my life in denial about my illness because my family thought as a child that I would grow up and grow out of the challenges I faced.

I always knew something was different about me. Most of the time I became symptomatic which resulted in long hospital stays and/or jail. Today, because of the mental health services I receive, I am able to function more independently and responsibly.

Last year, while at Chrysalis' Center for Recovery and Empowerment, with the help of staff, I was able to apply for and receive a grant from the North Central Regional Mental Health Board to start a bike club for individuals with mental health issues like myself. The turnout was amazing. The group participants gained a sense of community and wanted to go out even more. For me, the experience was even more than that. I gained a sense of accomplishment and self-worth which would not have happened without the grant from NCRMHB.

Today, I am active in advocacy and want to know more about how I can help build my community into a place that cares about all people. If you take the money from the Regional Mental Health Boards, it will reduce the services provided to people with mental illnesses. It would only create more problems; please do not do this.

Today, I actually feel like I matter and have even started looking for work. I need my supports to stay in place. I urge you to restore these harmful cuts to ensure crucial services are available to the residents of Connecticut.

Thank you for your attention to these important services and supports.